



Unearthing Techniques Lecturers Apply to Reflect on Their Teaching Process in Selected Universities in Lusaka and Copperbelt Provinces of Zambia

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ABSTRACT

This article explores techniques lecturers apply to reflect on their teaching process in selected universities in Lusaka and Copperbelt Provinces of Zambia. The study was qualitative underpinned with social constructivism worldview. The case study design was used. In this study, data was generated from 32 participants who were purposively selected and were subjected to one-on-one interviews and focus group discussions. The generated data was analyzed using thematic approach. The study revealed that public health lecturers reflect on their teaching process using academic assessment of students, peer reflective teaching, through participatory approaches, getting feedback from the learners, participatory work in the laboratory and action research. The study concluded that although lecturers reflected in and on their teaching, the style of reflection has not been enhanced to the level of them being critical and innovative reflective practitioners. Based on the findings, the study recommends that Education standards officers should continue to maintain standards in Universities and Colleges to control over enrolments and overcrowding in classes so that the lecturers can teach efficiently and effectively so that students can benefit fully from the lecturers.

Keywords: Public Health, Teaching Process, ways lecturers reflect.

INTRODUCTION

Literature has shown that reflective practice is considered to be cyclical and systematic inquiry where lecturers carefully correct evidence about their teaching practice in an effort to analyze,

interpret and evaluate their teaching experiences with the view to improve their future teaching (Mathew and Peechattue, 2017). This is supported by Moon (2004) who argued that one of the factors that can influence the quality of teaching and learning is reflective practice. The process of Reflective practice takes place when an individual explores an experience; they have had to identify what happened, and what their role in the experience was, including their thinking and behavior as well as emotions (Fook and Gardener, 2007).

Lew and Schmidt (2011) posit that reflective practice is considered important within health promotion. This is supported by Ciampa and Gallagher (2015) who observed that when teachers reflect on their teaching practices, it helps them to avoid teaching methods that have negative influence on the learning process of students. Equally, Kaufman and Mann (2010) observed that reflective skills are needed to capture the interplay between critical thinking and situational analysis in any professional. Korthagen (2017) is of the view that asking teachers to reflect on their personal core qualities along with their teaching competencies allows them to gain deeper awareness of their classroom problems thus, offering an opportunity to rethink of possible remedy to classroom fragilities (Matole, Muleya and Simui, 2023).

Hargreaves (2016) posit that reflective practice is central to medical education due to the fact that it helps lecturers to focus on approaches that increase in knowledge and clinical skills of students. Further Illeris (2003) reported that reflection can contribute significantly to the learning process. In this context, Illeris describes learning to consist of emotional and social dimensions as well as cognitive which requires one to pay attention to dynamics associated with teaching and learning process.

In view of the present study, many articles have highlighted that reflective practice is paramount in the teaching process as this can influence the quality of teaching. However, it must also be noted that the way and how reflective lecturers are toward their lectures would also influence students' critical thinking skills and academic performance. As such, the current exploration focuses on the ways lecturers reflect on their teaching process in selected universities in Lusaka and Copperbelt Provinces of Zambia. It attempts to study the reflective practices of lecturers from universities offering public health programmes and how it influences their teaching for quality deliverables.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study relied on Danielson (2012) teaching framework. Danielson (2012) emphasized, "Teachers' professional learning to include self-assessment, reflection on practice, and professional conversation". Therefore, this article argues that using a teaching framework such as The Danielson framework for teaching (2012) can enable teachers to measure their own teaching performance. This is supported by Disu (2017) who argued that following a framework is a good practice as this can help teachers to generate and receive feedback without the involvement of a supervisor. In the context of this study, it was ideal to adopt this teaching framework when unearthing ways through which public health lecturers reflect in and on their teaching, process based on its salient features which ranges from self-reflection when teaching, promoting collaborative inquiry and increasing reciprocal dialogue to support lecturers' improvement of their teaching.

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND OBJECTIVE

European Commission for Education and Training (2007) posit the development of the intellectual and reflective skills of students begins with the lecturers. Disu (2017) explains that when lecturers are embedded in reflective practice, they will be able to examine their practices, implement alternative methods and share the best practices with colleagues for achieving quality education. This view is in line with the quality of higher education and its relevance to industry as reflected in Educating Our Future Policy of 1996. However, this goal remains elusive and unachieved going by higher education performance reports of 2013-2014 which When public health lecturers do not attach any value to reflective practice, teaching becomes haphazardly, accidental and superficial (Stanton, 1990,). In spite of reflective practice being viewed by many scholars to be a beneficial classroom instructional practice in the public health teaching and learning process, ways lecturers reflect on their teaching process in universities offering public health programmes has not been adequately researched hence this study which was conducted in Lusaka and Copperbelt provinces of Zambia.

METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

This was a qualitative research riding on a case study design. This was targeted at four selected universities offering public health training in Lusaka and Copperbelt Provinces of Zambia. This study design falls within the constraints of constructivist and relativist ontology worldview whose argument paint a picture that knowledge generation and knowing a reality of a particular phenomenon requires social interaction with people. This entails that the researcher had an opportunity to interact with participants from the targeted universities as the cases to generate evidence on the values that lecturers place on reflective teaching practice.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

The study recruited 32 participants from four selected universities. The sample comprised of Deans, heads of department and the lecturers from the four universities in the school of public health. To recruit the participants, homogenous purposive sampling was used. The focus was to recruit participants who possessed similar characteristics that were relevant to the study (Creswell and Poth, 2017; Ritchie et al., 2014).

Tools for Data Production

The study relied on primary data which was collected through interview guide with semi-structured questions and focus group discussion. The use of Semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to gather in-depth information which gave the researcher a complete and detailed understanding of values placed by the lecturers on reflective practice (Creswell, 2013). However, before engaging participants in an interview, permission was sought from the relevant authorities.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Ways Lecturers Reflect in Their Teaching Process

Participants were asked to talk about ways in which lecturers reflect in their teaching process. Through various oral submissions, this article found that there were a number of progressive ways in which the lecturers reflected. However, the key ways evolved around, academic assessment of students, peer reflective teaching, through participatory approaches, getting feedback from the learners, participatory work in the laboratory and action research.

Academic Assessment of Students:

From the verbal accounts of the participants, giving students' tests, assignments and examinations were the main ways in which public health lecturers reflect on their teaching process. The participants argued that they usually reflective on their teaching through assessments which are given to them to write on a test or a quiz and an assignment on particular topics before they write their final examination. The participants further stated that in most universities, lecturers are required to assess students through writing tests and assignments before they sit for their final examination based on the courses which were taught or the topics. This is evident from the verbal responses below:

According to the university policy, before the final examination students should be assessed. This means that they should write test to assess their knowledge based on the courses which were taught or the topics. And also, not only that there are also assignments which are used to assess the ability of the students in terms of knowledge based on a certain topic" (FGD P2, University D).

For me I don't use one method of reflecting on my teaching but I use several techniques. I usually reflect on teaching by giving them an examination or quiz to write then I will evaluate them at the end of the term or when they are writing an examination. As you are marking the examination depending on the way these students are answering their questions that helps me to reflect on whether what I was teaching they were understanding or not. Whether I should continue with the same method or I should change so that these students will be able to answer and get the concepts of the field that they are studying. Because as long as one has not gotten the concept, they won't be able to apply as you know public health it's all about the application" (FDG P3, University C).

We also have continuous assessments work that we keep on giving them and those also have a way of reflecting on how someone has understood on a particular topic. So sometimes where you don't have that time to reflect you know after class because of all these things like time, workload and you have a lot on your table you get to observe after maybe test that you have given them or a quiz and then through that again you try and help them out, get back to the topic and learn more" (FGD P3, University B).

Findings of the study gives an impression that academic assessment of student was among key strategic ways in which public health lecturers reflected on their teaching. The implication of the academic assessment is that it provides lecturers with valuable information about the progress students are making during teaching and learning process. To this effect, the study revealed a number of ways in assessing students and these included, assignments, tests or quizzes on particular topics before they sit for their final examination based on the courses which students were taught in class. Participants argued that this process of giving assignment and test was meant to evaluate students as they are marking the given task. On the other hand, when marking the examination, the way students will be answering the questions helps lecturers to reflect on whether students understood the topics in class or not. This finding depict an idea that quizzes and examinations helps to promote reflective teaching in schools of public health because based on the performance of students, lecturers can ascertain if learning has taken place on the part of the students.

The above finding tallies with Illeris (2003) who reported that reflection can contribute to learning. Illeris describes learning to consist of emotional and social dimensions as well as cognitive. Three dimensions of learning identified included the contemporary learning theory in the tension field between the cognitive, the emotional and the social. Their research findings had shown that in practice, the cognitive aspects are most easily measured through assessments or performance of students. This means that academic assessment of students can be used as a strategy for reflecting on teaching practice.

Peer Reflective Teaching:

Another recurring theme in participants' explanation for their reflective teaching as educators was that some heads of department and senior lecturers usually visit students' classrooms and listen to the lecturer to see how they are teaching and if they observe some problems, they will sit down with the respective lecturer to provide feedbacks on what went on well and also what did not go well. The participants mentioned that peer reflective teaching is conducted when a junior lecturer has been given a class to start teaching and also when students bring complaints to the HOD on the way the lectures are delivered to them. This is evident from the verbal responses below:

If we have a new lecturer what we do is that we give them support we do not want them to feel like they are just dropped from heaven where they don't know what to do. So, what we do is that we ask them questions that; are you free if I can send someone to come and just sit in class to see how you will be conducting your lecture or lesson to the students as you are teaching? So, we always do that just to make sure that everyone must know that there are some people concerned with the quality of teaching. We usually try to sit in maybe four to five lectures and then give you feedback that maybe he or she is fine" (KII-HOD, University D).

If there have been complaints from students of course what we occasionally do is to sit in the class and listen to the lecturer to see how they are teaching and if there is a problem, sometimes we do peer to peer where we ask one member of staff to sit in. For example, if there is one member who is having a lot of complaints, we ask a more senior member of staff to go and sit with him/her and they swap. It's like the junior member of staff listen to the senior member of staff teaching on his/her behalf, so this helps because if you just sit to listen to the members of staff and talk to them, they will say everything is perfect" (KII-Dean, University C).

[...] for our junior lecturers we always want to see that the senior member of staff in the beginning you know they sit in and it's not like we are trying to evaluate them as per se, it's part of seeing how you communicate with the students. You know like if it's my subject area where I am specialized, then I can sit with the lecturer and say that there it's wrong, it was supposed to be this way and you know that you just come out frank. Sometimes you know in the beginning people don't take it that easily when you point the finger, I keep on telling them that it's not the idea that I want to bring you down but just to make sure that we take the material across properly" (KII-Dean, University D).

The study found that another way lecturers reflected during their teaching was through peer reflective teaching. The implication of this finding was that through peer reflective teaching, lecturers were able to gauge themselves if they are able to deliver lessons to the expected standards of their universities. In this regard, participants mentioned that some heads of

department and senior lecturers usually visits students classrooms and listen to the lecturer to see how they are teaching and if they observe some problems, they will sit down with the respective lecturer to provide feedbacks on what went on well and also what did not go well. The key informants argued that peer reflective teaching is employed when a junior lecturer has been recruited in the department and also when students bring complaints to the HOD on the way lessons are delivered to them. Concerning the junior lecturers, key informants argued that the HODs or senior lecturers are assigned to observe the new lecturers on how teach and give them feedback at the class. This is a clear evidence that reflective practice is key because it accord an opportunity to the lecturers to carefully correct evidence about their teaching practice in an effort to analyze, interpret and evaluate their teaching experiences with the view to improve their future teaching (Mathew and Peechattue, 2017).

Participatory Approach:

The findings of the study revealed that participatory approach was universally mentioned by all the main participants from the FGDs and the key informants as one of the ways in which public health lecturers reflect on their teaching process. In terms of participatory methods of reflective teaching, Question and answer sessions during class, doing recaps on the previous lesson, and Class group work are some of the common ways used. This is evident from the verbal responses below:

Usually after a lecture, you ask them a question one or two. The way they answer will tell me whether they are trying to explain to me that they understood or not. Then I will try to find a way to make them understand by maybe going back and explain or using the same questions to give them an assignment so that when they come, we discuss the same thing so that in the next lecture I will have a different approach so that they can be able to understand what they are learning” (FGD P3, University C).

So, the first thing in terms of strategies are repeating the topic or the key concepts on what you want them to grasp if they did not grasp it. Ahh since learning is progressive let’s say today, I have a class and tomorrow I have the same class based on my reflection today tomorrow I will be able to say no! I need to do a recap on what I taught last time by asking them questions and also apart from that we also allow students to approach us if they don’t understand. So that is one way of trying to improve in terms of everything” (FGD P1, University B).

The study also found that participatory approach was another strategy used by the lecturers in their reflection. The implication of this finding is that as lecturers engage students in the teaching and learning process, they are able to know different levels of learning difficulties of their students hence offering an opportunity to find ways how to assist them. The participants had mentioned that they usually ask students one or two questions before they start teaching on a new topic to assess their level of knowledge. Sometimes students are asked questions at the end of the lesson which helps the lecturer to reflect on the way the students are answering the questions in class and if everyone is participating then it will tell them that they understood the topic but if majority of the students are not answering the question correct then they think of how best to engage them so that they are able to learn the concepts in that particular topic. The above findings are supported by Hargreaves (2016) who carried out a study at Leeds University and found that structured support and learning opportunities built into the spiral curriculum proved to be an effective way of facilitating deeper and meaningful reflective

practice over time. The researcher discovered that supported (scaffolded) learning is facilitated by means of small-group discussions and questioning by the tutor or coach to prompt continual reflection, central to most models of a reflective process. This competence moves to self-questioning by the individual, demonstrated in conversations and formative assessments, and becomes part of the repertoire of learning.

Getting Feedbacks from the Learners:

The study found that participants highlighted those two ways of reflecting on their teaching through getting feedbacks from the learners. The key informants said that the heads of department (HODs) hold monthly meetings with the class representatives where they listen to the views of the students on how the lectures are conducted and challenges they face as students. This meeting is only held with the class representative and the HOD to allow the students to open-up as they bring out the issues affecting their well-being without feeling uncomfortable with the presence of lecturers. In addition, the HODs also hold separate meetings with respective lecturers in the department by listening to the views of the lecturers and get feedback which is presented to the class representative. At times feedback is obtained through lecturers' consultation from the students. Then from there they find the best way of improving on the reflective teaching and the learning process of the students. The quotes below illustrate this point:

[...] lecturers reflect in different ways like using different methods and sometimes they listen to their students, peer lecturers and they get feedback either through students when they are teaching to identify the strengths and weaknesses because in the middle of the group work or when you are doing it you get feedback and that tells you as a lecturer whether you are delivering or not" (KII-Dean, University C).

Then sometimes you can ask how the students are feeling after the lecture; did they gain some more knowledge after the lecture or not. From there you can see on what did not go well and find ways on how to improve it" (KII-HOD, University C).

Findings of the study gives an impression that getting feedback from the learners was another reflective practice used by the lecturers from the selected universities. This meant though this process, lecturers were able to weigh their strengths and weaknesses. Key informants said that the heads of department (HODs) usually hold two monthly meetings and one is held with the class representatives without the lecturers where they listen to the views of the students on how the lectures are conducted and challenges they face as students. By implication, this allows the students to open-up as they bring out the issues affecting their well-being without feeling uncomfortable with the presence of lecturers. The second meeting is held with lecturers without the students within the department to listen to their views and get feedback which is presented to the students through their class representative. Once these two meetings have been held, the HODs find the best way of improving on the reflective teaching and the learning process of the students. This is supported by Marzano, Frontier, and Livingston (2011) who stated that a teaching framework can be used as a guide for teachers' self-reflection as teachers examine components within the instructional framework to improve on their daily teaching practices. They added that teachers can generate and receive feedback without the involvement of a supervisor. Thus, a teaching framework can promote collaborative inquiry and increase collegial dialogue to support teachers' improvement of their teaching.

Practical Work in the Laboratory:

During FGDs with the public health lecturers from three (3) of the universities it was mentioned that practical work in the laboratory and using teaching visual aid (e.g. pictures of the events) through the projector in order for the students to see what is happening in the world were major reflective teaching strategies that some lecturers employed for improving their teaching practice and learning process. The participants teaching practical courses said that they usually reflect on their teaching as when students are doing practical work in the laboratory using the objective structured clinical examination (OSCEs). The OSCE method allows students to practice what they learnt in class and if they are not able to apply the skills they were taught in class then the lecturer and other colleagues will be able to reflect and say that the knowledge imparted in their students was not understood by the students. This is evident from the verbal responses below:

We can also do reflective learning as we are doing practical or we call it the objective structured clinical examination (OSCEs) as students are in the practical room, are they able to do that which they were taught in class but if they are not then it's me and my friends who are able to reflect to say ok the knowledge that we imparted in our students they haven't gotten the concept they can't apply on the prevention of infection or they can't apply to do a procedure. Then I will change as I reflect so that they are able to do what is right thank you (FGD P3, University C).

For the courses that are theoretical like my course, you find change for example when I am teaching on effects of climate change I use a projector then I use visual aid for them to see the effects of climate change. So when they are able to see the pictures on what is happening elsewhere in other countries they are able to relate and understand very well because these are real things that are happening and they can see those things, the pictures can be collected from the Internet for example what was happening in Germany where there were floods and sometimes we tell them to be watching the news like on BBC they show all these things and they talk about these things almost every day. So also that helps them to understand yah (FGD P4, University B).

The study also found that practical work in the laboratory is one of the one ways in which lecturers reflect in their teaching. Through the responses given, it was found that the use of practical work in the laboratory and teaching visual aid (e.g. pictures of the events) is cardinal as it helps students to see what is happening in the world. Some of the lecturers teaching practical courses argued that they reflect on their teaching when students are doing practical work in the laboratory using the objective structured clinical examination (OSCEs). The participants mentioned that when teaching practical courses, they first give a theoretical part of the topic to the students and then later on take the students to the laboratory to conduct an OSCE in the practical room. In that room, all the students are expected to demonstrate on the skills they were taught in class and using OSCE method allows students to practice what they learnt in class and if they are failing to apply the skills taught in class; then the lecturer and other colleagues will be able to know that the knowledge transmitted in their students was not understood.

This finding resonates well with Kaufman and Mann (2010) who synthesized the many elements of learning about professionalism is a complex process in the development of a

professional identity, and strong reflective skills are needed to capture the interplay between critical thinking and situational analysis. Capacity building for deep learning and reflective practice in medicine is imperative to ensure recognition of the complex elements of patient safety and safe practice. They added that deep learning can be integrated with current experience and knowledge, resulting in rich cognitive networks that the individual can draw on in practice.

Action Research:

This study found that lecturers were also using action research to reflect on their teaching. Findings showed that all the participants from the focus group discussions agreed of having used action research in their reflective teaching practice. The participants mentioned that one way in which they employ action research is by giving students questions on certain topics to look up for information and they make presentations the following day. This is evident from the verbal responses below:

Yah like for me there are cases when I give my students a particular topic to go and research on it then they present or share with the rest of the class on a later date. Yah and I feel that it works for the better because sometimes they even discover new information that sometimes me as a lecturer, I don't have on the notes that I have; I don't have that information but it is very vital information. Then you discover how much they know about a particular subject and that helps them to understand and usually for me what I do sometimes if I want them to really pay attention on what their friends have researched on, I tell them that I will not lecture this topic because this is a lesson listen and pay attention, listen to your friends because I will examine you on the same or give you a test on it. Then you will see that they will exchange notes on what the other guys have researched on yah it works" (FGD P4, University B).

"I participated in action research especially when I teach a topic on nutritional surveillance, which is one of the topics in the public health and nutrition. We had to take students to areas like Chibombo and Liteta where the whole class went out for field work for one week and we were collecting data. Such a topic when you teach it theoretically students will not understand. So we were able now to make the teaching practical because they viewed it as they connected to what is on the ground in terms of the data that was being collected" (FGD P3, University C). The above findings reflect well with Moon (2004) who argued that although reflection is akin to thinking, there is more to its content. According to Moon, reflection is a process that lies somewhere between learning and thinking. She argues that 'we reflect in order to learn something, or we learn as a result of reflecting, therefore, 'reflective learning' as a term, simply emphasises the intention to learn as a result of reflection'. Moon also maintains that reflection is not only a form of mental processing, but also 'a process of re-organising knowledge and emotional orientations in order to achieve further insights. In the context of this study, it can be argued that action reach may trigger students to think critically and offer better solutions to health challenges.

Findings of the study gives an impression that action research undertaken by the students helped the lectures to assess students on their ability to generate new ideas consistent with Namonje, Halwiindi, Zyambo, Simui & Muleya (2023) on reflective practices by lecturers in Zambia. The implication of this finding is that when students are able to apply the concepts, they learned in class to the real world experience then it means that learning has taken place.

To this effect, the study found that lecturers usually employ action research in several ways and these included; giving students questions on certain topics to look up for information and make presentations the following day.

CONCLUSION

The study concluded that there are myriad ways in which lecturers reflect on their teaching. However, the key ones which are highly linked to quality outcome of teaching and learning process were, academic assessment of students, peer reflective teaching, through participatory approaches, getting feedback from the learners, participatory work in the laboratory and action research. This gives an impression that the revealed ways of reflective practice by lecturers if well harnessed can help to transmit knowledge and skills to the students in a way that will help them to deal with real, complex and difficult situation in the area of health.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made;

1. Universities offering health courses should enhance the ties between Health Professional Council of Zambia (HPCZ) and the Higher Education Authority (HEA) as these institutions can help to validate the public health curriculum with the desire to embed reflective practice.
2. Education standards officers should continue to maintain standards in Universities and Colleges to control over enrolments and overcrowding in classes so that the lecturers can teach efficiently and effectively so that students can benefit fully from the lecturers.
3. There is need for university administrators to enhance support and encourage in-service training and provide capacity building to lecturers.

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